

SEC BRIEFING

14 June 1955

ARGENTINE CHURCH-STATE CONFLICT

- I. New incidents -- growing out of the seven-month Peronista campaign to reduce the Catholic church's political power -- have raised political tension in Argentina to its highest peak in over two years. There were large-scale Catholic demonstrations on 11 June and minor clashes on 12 and 13 June.
 - A. Catholic groups became increasingly active in resisting Peron's campaign following December '54 passage of new laws which legalized both divorce and prostitution (latter known as "Law of Social Prophylaxis"), also granted inheritance and other rights to illegitimate children.
- C. Anti-Peronists, regardless of complexion, have joined the fray, and pro-CHURCH pamphlets have been circulated both by Communists and by the major opposition Radical Party (which traditionally advocates separation of church and state).
- II. Strongest Catholic agitation was triggered by legislation passed last month, which -- among other provisions -- calls

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up specially elected assembly within 180 days to consider constitutional revision formally separating church and state.

- A. Article 2 of present Argentine constitution declares that the federal government shall support the Roman Catholic Church.
- B. Other May laws abolished compulsory Catholic education, financial subsidies, and tax exemption for the church.
- C. Although revenue is involved, political (rather than financial) motives appear dominant in latter actions.
- D. Although representatives of all Argentine political groups are reported to favor the new legislation, many have objected to the turbulent atmosphere in which it has been promoted.

iii. Principal impetus for Peron's campaign against his former ally apparently stems from his conviction that opposition elements in Argentina were working with some of the Catholic clergy to organize a "Christian Democratic" political movement aimed at the overthrow of his regime.

- A. Peron also resents Church competition and agitation against his youth program for training of future Peronistas.
- B. Peron steadfastly maintains he is not attacking the Church itself, but only its political action.
- C. Charges Church is supporting attempts to create a new "democratic-clerical-oligarchical union" which would continue opposition efforts of past 18 years to oust his regime.

25X1 IV. Although plans for an Argentine "Christian Democratic" movement [redacted] there are indications that

several of Peron's leftist advisers may have exaggerated the movement's importance in order to make Peron veer from his more moderate rightward trend of past two years.

A. "Strange bedfellow" support for the Church by various opposition groups would also tend to inflame Peron's suspicions.

V. Church-state conflict is not expected to threaten stability of Peron regime for the present, but the issue remains susceptible to serious incidents of violence until after the constituent assembly meets (possibly in early November).

A. Issue has given opposition elements--especially Radicals and Communists--their best vehicle to date for fomenting anti-Peron sentiment.

B. Conflict also ^{may} create friction among Peronistas themselves.